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SUBJECT: AUSTRIAN MEDIA HIGHLIGHTS: May 30, 2007

Darabos Wants More Money

1. Defense Minister Norbert Darabos from the SPOe is continuing his efforts to demonstrate his commitment to his office beyond the controversial Eurofighter purchase deal, Austrian media say. He discussed the status of the Austrian army's reform process, and dismissed criticism of his performance in office. In addition, he urged Finance Minister Wilhelm Molterer (OeVP) to increase funds for the military in the next double budget for 2009/2010, according to independent provincial daily Salzburger Nachrichten.

Vienna Conference: Impulse for the Middle East

2. Austrian Foreign Minister Ursula Plassnik wants to "set the ball rolling" with the two-day international conference "Women Leaders - Networking for Peace and Security in the Middle East," which begins in Vienna today. The meeting is "not about developing a new Mideast road map," but about looking at the Middle East peace process in connection with the economy, the media and society, as well as about providing the opportunity for "dialogue, contacts, and influence capabilities."

Like all Austrian media reporting on the international "Women Leaders" conference hosted by Foreign Minister Plassnik in Vienna on Wednesday and Thursday, semi-official daily Wiener Zeitung notes that the meeting will bring together women holding key positions in politics, the media, business and civil society to discuss ways to boost peace and security in the Middle East. The conference program includes workshops on the role of the media, on economic development, and on networking in politics and civil society in the Mideast peace process. A meeting has also been scheduled of the "Women's Empowerment Network," which unites female foreign ministers and presidents from around the world. US Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice, Israeli Foreign Minister Tzipi Livni, Hanan Ashrawi of the Palestinian Legislative Council and Sheikha Haya Rashed al-Khalifa, the President of the UN General Assembly, are among the conference participants.

Centrist daily Die Presse headlines "Women on the margins of society" and suggests that "women politicians are to bring new hope to the Middle East. But hardly anywhere else are women as under-represented politically and discriminated by law as in the Arab World." Thus, the "real motto" of the Vienna conference could be "power to the women," the Presse says. The assumption here is that women are better suited than men to establish peace, which is one of the reasons why the Middle East is topping the conference agenda, given that it is the region in more dire need of peace than any other in the world. According to the Presse, women do not occupy positions of power in any Middle East country with the exception of

Israel, with Foreign Minister Tzipi Livni. Also, more often than not, if they make it into politics they are being palmed off with "soft" portfolios. This is hardly different from the situation in many Western states, but in the Middle East the women's politically shadowy existence reflects a kind of discrimination that goes much deeper. The Presse also reports on "how Plassnik got Condoleezza Rice to come to Vienna," saying that the idea to hold a conference in Vienna focusing on women and the Middle East was first floated at the "Women's Empowerment Network" meeting in New York last year. Mass-circulation provincial daily Kleine Zeitung, liberal daily Der Standard, and mass-circulation daily Kurier also report on the issue.

Bush Chooses New World Bank Boss

¶3. US President George Bush has chosen former Deputy Secretary of State Robert Zoellick to be the next President of the World Bank. Zoellick will replace Paul Wolfowitz, who is leaving the bank after the scandal over his girlfriend's promotion. An aide to President Bush said he expects the World Bank board to approve Zoellick's appointment. The former Deputy Secretary of State can rely on excellent contacts among business and political leaders all over the world, Austrian media say.

On ORF radio's early morning news Morgenjournal, Washington correspondent Raimund Loew comments on the appointment of Robert Zoellick as the new World Bank President: "The White House says it has received only positive feedback regarding the President's candidate, even from the usually so critical Europeans. Robert Zoellick has belonged to the Bush administrations' top team from day one. ... The call from several developing nations led by Brazil that the next World Bank President be chosen in an open selection process went unheard, though," Loew says, and concludes: "It is now up to Zoellick to restore the World Bank's credibility, which his predecessor Wolfowitz gambled away. This will not only require the strictest observance of the ethical standards Wolfowitz came into conflict with; he will also need to re-establish the fundamental faith in the World Bank's role as supporter of the poorest countries," says Loew.

Mideast Quartet Meets in Berlin

¶4. Leading representatives of the Middle East Quartet are holding talks in Berlin today in an attempt to push for de-escalation in the region. German Foreign Minister Frank-Walter Steinmeier, US Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice, and the top diplomats from

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Russia, the EU and the UN will attend the summit, which comes at a time when the "situation in the Middle East must be considered a matter of gravest concern," Austrian media quote from a German Foreign Ministry statement. The US Secretary of State will travel from Berlin to Vienna tomorrow to attend the international conference hosted by Austrian Foreign Minister Ursula Plassnik, says ORF online news.

Sarkozy Won't Block Turkey Talks

¶5. French President Nicolas Sarkozy said he will not block further talks on Turkey's accession to the European Union, although he is known to oppose Turkey's membership in EU. Talks with Ankara on three more chapters in the membership process are scheduled to begin in June, according to ORF radio early morning news Morgenjournal. McCaw